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THE SWORD AND TRUMPET monthly magazine is a faith ministry directed by a Board representing various constituencies of the Mennonite Church. It is committed to defending, proclaiming, and promoting the whole Gospel of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It emphasizes neglected truth and contends for "the faith which was once delivered to the saints." This publication exposes and opposes doctrinal error which compromises that faith and leads to apostasy.

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IN THIS ISSUE

1. PERSON OF THE MONTH: William Perkins	1
2. Thinking Theologically About Immigration	2
3. FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: Our Environmental Responsibility	4
4. THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS	5
5. NEWSLINES	11
6. Should Christians Be Diligent Obeyers?	14
7. SERMON OF THE MONTH: Living the Life of Jesus	17
8. COUNSELING FROM THE WORD: "Why I Will Not Divorce My Husband"	22
9. BEGINNING ISSUES: Can Man Create Life?	25
10. SONG OF THE MONTH: "Whate'er of Earthly Bliss"	26
11. Why Join a Church?	28

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"WHY I WILL NOT DIVORCE MY HUSBAND" . . . cont'd. from p. 24

My journey is not over. My husband and I are in the process of being restored in our marriage. There have been many times since he came home that were as tough to endure as when he was gone from us. Satan is still after him and after our marriage. I know there are still painful times ahead in this process. Yet I believe God will see our family through the days ahead as He has the past two years. I am truly grateful for what God has allowed for us. I believe He wants to use us together for His glory again someday. Until then I can only stay bowed to what God allows and continue to rest in His love.

Now I want to say to the glory of God and as a result of the tenacious, faithful covenant-keeping love of this

wife demonstrating God's covenant-keeping love to her husband, that couple is together today. They are walking with the Lord. Their children are walking with the Lord. And they are being used to bring glory to Him. Not without challenges, but restoration and redemption really are possible.

I'm so glad she wrote this before she saw the outcome while she was still in the throes of it. I know I'm speaking to some who are in the throes of it right now. I just thought perhaps this story would help give you some perspective, some things to think about, some questions to ask. Would you just be willing to turn your heart to the Lord and say, "Lord, I want to think Your way about this"?

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PERSON OF THE MONTH: William Perkins . . . cont'd. from p. 1

important journey: that of marriage. William and Timothy Cradocke were married on July 2. The Lord blessed their union with the births of seven children, three of whom died very young as a result of various illnesses. Their last child was born after William's death.

Perkins continued working at Cambridge University after resigning his fellowship. From 1590-1591 he was dean of Christ's College. He also wrote a catechism which he taught weekly at Corpus Christi College. When he went over the Ten Commandments he taught them in such a way that people were convicted of their need of Christ. On Sunday afternoons he was available to give godly advice to those seeking, as well as counseling with those who were under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. William was also faithful to go to the prisons to preach to the inmates. He was greatly concerned about the fate of the lost and their need of Christ. He knew, however, that a profession of faith was not evidence of a genuine disciple unless the life lined up with the Word of God.

Brother William Perkins wrote several books which are still available and beneficial to us today. He tried to explain the Gospel clearly in one of his writings citing the various false views and clearly explaining what the Bible has to say on this important doctrine. Perkins also wrote several commentaries on the Scriptures. In 1597, he authored a powerful treatise which defended the Church of England against the Roman Catholic Church and its false beliefs. Perkins was one of only a few Puritan theologians who set at the task of writing a systematic theology, of which his was the most successful. His books were translated into nine different languages and were probably read more than any other Puritan theologian's. He has been reportedly called "The Father of Puritanism."

In his short life William was used of God to accomplish much in His kingdom. William Perkins died in 1602, as a result of having kidney stones. He was 44 years of age. His body was interred in the St. Andrews Church. — Gail L. Emerson

Person of the Month:

William Perkins (1558-1602)



In 1558 William Perkins was born in the village of Marston Jabbett, Warwickshire, England, to Thomas and Hannah Perkins.

As a young person his lifestyle was the opposite of godly. It sounded more like that of an unsaved youth of the twenty-first century rather than the sixteenth—rebellion, disobedience, foul language, and drunkenness. However, God used the words of a young mother to her child to bring conviction to his heart. William overheard the mother tell her disobedient child that she was going to turn the tot over to the drunken William Perkins. William was distressed that others knew of his wayward life and God used this to bring him to Himself. The Lord gloriously saved him and William’s lifestyle changed dramatically!

In 1577, at the age of 19, Perkins enrolled at Christ’s College, Cambridge, to study mathematics. However, after his conversion he changed his course of study to theology. He could not afford college on his own so he became a “pensioner” meaning that he paid his way through college by working for others who needed work done. Another change was evident in his life now. William Perkins gave up his interest in the occult and black magic to wholeheartedly study about the Lord and His Word.

While at college Brother William found three spiritual brothers who became close friends. One of them, Laurence Chaderton, was a mentor to him during those college years.

Four years later, in 1581, at the age of 22, Perkins earned his bachelor’s degree, followed by his master’s degree in 1584. Upon receiving his master’s degree William became a preacher and lecturer at St. Andrew’s Church at Cambridge. He served in this position for the rest of his life.

Perkins preached in a way that was very understandable. He was bold in his approach, imploring people to be in right relationship with God. The Holy Spirit used the clear preaching of the Gospel to bring many souls to Himself, both common folk (who were William’s focus) and the educated.

During his years at Cambridge he was also a “fellow” at the college—involving himself in the lives of students by tutoring, lecturing, preaching, and helping them in general. He continued in this role until 1595. Brother William was an example to the students and the rest of the faculty as to what a godly life looks like. He encouraged his students to read God’s Word as well as theologically sound authors. William was a Puritan preacher, meaning he was part of a group of Protestants within the Church of England who were calling the church to simplify their doctrine and worship as well as encouraging believers to live a disciplined lifestyle. He had a positive influence on many of his students and a number of them became Puritan theologians—men such as William Ames, Richard Sibbes, John Cotton, John Preston, and Thomas Goodwin.

In 1595, at the age of 37, Perkins resigned from his job as a fellow to embark on a most
(continued on page 37)

Thinking Theologically About Immigration

by Alejandro Mandes

Often politics and economics frame the immigration debate in North America. Yet Christ-followers must frame the topic of immigration by wider parameters—by two biblical mandates: the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Matthew 28:19, 20 says to make disciples of all people—not legal people only, but all people. As Christ-followers our focus must shift from nationalism to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, from politics to the gospel, from winners and losers to how we can best glorify God.

We must never deny that illegal immigrants are breaking the law. Yet these immigrants' law-breaking is no reason for the church to remain uninvolved in North America's largest mission field today consisting of fifteen to eighteen million people, many of whom tremble in the shadows of our society. Civil law is written on soft paper and constantly evolves. God's law was chiseled on stone tablets and has remained unchanged.

The eighteen million undocumented people living among us present both danger and opportunity. The danger lies only in the sense that the people are outside of the "system." But we have an opportunity in terms of our mission. Many of these people are outside of their home countries, separated from their families, and outside of their own governments' systems. They are prime for the gospel!

Many churches want to do something,

but they wonder what they *can* do. And here's where we need some reminders: it is legal to evangelize; it is legal to make disciples; and it is legal to be compassionate. What the law says is that it's illegal for us to hire them. We also cannot provide false paperwork.

So how do we live out our biblical mandates?

- We must remember that immigrants were made in the image of God. That means in all our dealings we must treat them with dignity.
- We must keep in focus the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.
- We must emulate Paul's actions in the first century as we walk the fine line between compassion and execution of the law.

Paul's epistle to Philemon mentions the runaway slave, Onesimus. Onesimus was out of his country and running from the law when he encountered the Apostle Paul. Knowing the legal system, Paul could have turned him in immediately. Instead, Paul loved him, evangelized him, and discipled him. This probably happened over the course of months or even years. But as any disciple must be, Paul was also a person of obedience. For that reason Paul ultimately sent Onesimus back to his master. Yet he did not return him empty-handed. He sent him with a letter that told Philemon to treat Onesimus as a brother and put his debt on Paul's account. In other words Paul, rather than turning in Onesimus or

staying aloof from him, stayed on mission. The result was fruit. And the ultimate result was obedience in all spheres—first to the gospel, then to compassion, then to civil law.

So what must the church do about contemporary illegal immigrants?

- **Speak.** Christian leaders must articulate that the commission and commandment apply even to these modern-day Samaritans.
- **Pray.** Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers, and work for a legal resolution on the matter of immigration reform.
- **Love.** Show compassion. Mercy builds bridges to the gospel in ways words cannot.
- **Serve.** Volunteer to teach English as a second language. Serve as a life coach. Counsel the vulnerable.
- **Share.** Spread the gospel. Show the way to Christ. If God puts immigrants in our paths, we have the privilege of sharing the message of salvation.
- **Enjoy.** Build relationships without worrying about the language barrier. Love is a universal language.
- **Envision.** Recognize that many illegal immigrants are demographically the future of North America. We have an opportunity for significant outreach in a time of need.

Within three to five years approximately eighteen million North American immigrants will probably come out of the shadows. Those who have shared in their pain have an opportunity to share in a harvest of souls in a magnitude never before seen.

Most evangelicals did not join with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his nonviolent opposition to racial injustice. Now many wish they had. The church today has an opportunity to show compassion, to be missional, to demonstrate obedience to the Great Commandment by reaching immigrants with love.

So here's the question to ask ourselves about immigration: Will we think only politically or will we think missionally, eternally—like Paul? And ultimately like Jesus? ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Kindred Spirit*, Spring/Summer 2010.



Our Environmental Responsibility . . . cont'd.

We are thankful to God that He has given us direction and principles from His Word in regard to preserving the earth. We believe from the Scriptures that human beings are the crown of God's creation; that they have been given supremacy over lower life forms and have been made stewards of God's creation.

So we take responsible care of all which God has created. We reduce, reuse and recycle, but we do so with the recognition that our focus is different from that of those who see the destiny of mankind as resting in our own hands. We teach our children to be frugal and saving of resources, because it is a Godly principle.

In the not-so-distant future we believe that this entire present world will undergo a great change. This old world and all in it will be destroyed, and that glorious transformation will be ushered in which all Christians look forward to, "*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*" (2 Peter 3:13). ■

—Reprinted with permission from the *Ontario Informer*, May 2010.

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Our Environmental Responsibility

by Mervin Brubacher

“What are you doing in recognition of Earth Day?” is a question you may have encountered in the last few weeks. For the Christian, understanding how to balance biblical stewardship with the present pressure toward “earth salvation” becomes a pertinent issue.

One of our foundational Christian beliefs is expressed in the words of Genesis 1:1, “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*” Our faith finds an anchor in this truth. Mankind is not here on earth as a result of some cosmic accident, or random evolutionary process. We are here because God created the earth, and “*he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else*” (Isaiah 45:18). Not only did God create the earth, but He did so for the express purpose of having it inhabited.

We do well to draw our attention, and that of our children, back to this elementary foundation from time to time. This is especially important today, because much of society’s focus regarding the environment comes from a godless worldview, and not Christian faith.

Increasingly we are reminded of our ethical responsibility to care for the earth, and to be environmentally responsible. Of course, much of that is good. It is an expression of practical stewardship to take care of the earth’s resources, and not waste what has been given us to use and enjoy. “*Reduce, reuse, and recycle*” is a principle we can support.

We do, however, reject the new age concept that unless we are willing to embrace some extreme ideas of environmental care, mankind will ultimately be responsible for the earth’s destruction, and therefore man’s doom.

We must understand why a right belief regarding man’s place in creation is important. If the universe and life on earth really did come about by chance, then you as a human are worth no more than your dog or cat, or any animal in the wild. This leads to conclusions such as the one a few years ago, where, after a hiker was killed by a cougar in the western mountains, there were those who thought the body should have been left for the cougar, because after all, it was now his. *(continued on page 3)*

PAGE 4

SWORD AND TRUMPET

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

AUGUST 1, 2010

Faithful Under Test

Philippians 1:15-29

Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, the text for our first four lessons in August, was written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome and sent by the hand of Epaphroditus. Its occasion was to thank the Philippian church for their gift (4:18), to encourage unity (2:2, 3; 4:2), and to encourage them to accept Epaphroditus back into their fellowship with joy over his restoration to health (2:25-30). It was also an epistle of encouragement to faithfulness against the erroneous teaching (3:2, 18) of those who would pervert the pure doctrine of Christ. This was primarily a friend-to-friends letter, written perhaps ten years after the founding of the church at Philippi (Acts 16) on Paul's second missionary journey, thus becoming the first Christian church on the continent of Europe.

Here in the first chapter, after his greeting, words of commendation and encouragement, Paul expresses joy that the gospel was being preached in Rome, even though not always from the purest motives. Though confined to house arrest, Paul recognizes (verses 12, 13) that this has provided unique opportunities to share the gospel with the soldiers guarding him and with others of Caesar's court. His faithful, consistent witness has also emboldened other believers (v. 14) to more openly share the gospel message.

However, Paul states, some, unfortunately, were preaching in an effort to discredit him. Others took courage from his

testimony and joined in the defense of the gospel. All were preaching Christ's gospel, and that encouraged Paul. The important thing was the proclamation of the gospel, regardless of motive. That caused Paul to rejoice.

Paul expresses confidence (v. 19) that through the prayers of the Philippian believers and the work of the Holy Spirit, he will be victorious in whatever trial he faces—either before Caesar or from those seeking to add to his misery. His desire was to always be bold in his proclamation of the truth and faithful in his living so that Christ will not be ashamed of him.

Paul's consuming passion is to live for Christ, and to expend his energies in proclaiming His saving grace. However, if called upon to die for the sake of Christ, he is ready. In fact, in a sense he would choose that, so to be the sooner with Christ. However, to remain in this life he would continue to be of benefit to other believers, strengthening them in their faith. This created a dilemma in Paul's mind. He does intimate (v. 26) that he hopes to see the Philippian believers again, and that his visit will cause them to rejoice in this blessing provided by Christ.

In the meantime, Paul admonishes them, live consistently, be united in mind and purpose in the defense and proclamation of the gospel. And don't fear your adversaries. Your faithful stand will be a witness against them, reminding them of the doom that awaits due to their rejection of Christ. And don't be surprised if called upon to suffer for the name of Christ. That is both a result and a privilege of being Christ's follower.

AUGUST 2010

PAGE 5

For thought and discussion

1. How can we best defend the gospel? Discuss.
2. Paul had a burning passion to live for Christ and to die for Him if necessary. Use his testimony to examine your own life and motives.
3. It is important that our lives grace the gospel we profess. What happens when it doesn't? What are some practical ways we can do this? Discuss.
4. How do we respond to those who are adversarial to the gospel? Do we shrink in fear? stand firm? witness boldly? (See 1 John 4:4.)
5. God has graciously provided a gospel for us to believe in and from which to derive hope for the future. Are we willing to suffer physical torture to remain true? What's the alternative?

Lesson emphasis: A call to faithful living and faithful proclamation of the gospel even under the threat of persecution or death.

Key verse: 27

AUGUST 8, 2010

Faithful to the End

Philippians 2:1-18

Paul was keenly aware that among any group of people, even Christians, there was always the potential for factionalism and discord. Apparently he sensed a bit of this at Philippi, and addresses it here in terms of their relationship to Christ and of his personal concern for them. He does not chide, but simply appeals on the basis of their unity in Christ. That unity should provide the basis for harmony among them in the laying aside of personal prestige or selfish ambitions.

Paul suggests that harmony comes through humility. It takes a real measure of humility to "esteem other[s] better than [our]selves." But once we perceive ourselves all on an equal basis before God we will have achieved the humility of mind which

results in acceptance of ourselves and our brother as being of equal value in God's sight. That realization does away with strife, vainglory, and selfish ambition. Paul says that realization among the Philippian believers will bring him great joy.

The appeal to that attitude is found in the example of Christ. Though God, He humbled Himself to take on the limitations of mankind. It is difficult for our finite minds to fully grasp the extent of Christ's humility, exchanging His exalted position in Heaven for the humble role of servant to mankind, even humbling Himself to death on a cross in order that man might find life.

As a result of His sacrificial humility, however, God the Father has restored Him to a position of honor and worship. Those who recognize His work of salvation bow the knee to Him in humble adoration. Those who reject His saving grace will nevertheless one day bow to Him in recognition as the Lord of lords. One day His exaltation will be complete, His voluntary humility on man's behalf recognized for the tremendous sacrifice that it was.

Now, Paul says to the Philippian believers, it is God who works His perfect will in your lives. Therefore he calls them to continued obedience to the will of God and to "work out," or manifest their salvation through works of love, humility of spirit, and unity of purpose. Their lives must be above reproach, sincere, honest, open, worthy examples of the life of Christ whom they profess to follow.

These believers at Philippi, as do Christians in every era, lived in a wicked world. Men are perverse in their thinking and living. The forces of darkness are ever prevalent. Evil abounds. Paul therefore calls these believers, and us, to "shine as lights in the world," to dispel the darkness, and to show the way to real life, life in Christ. A true Christian testimony cannot be hid, nor blotted out by the surrounding darkness (see Matthew 5:14-16). It will prevail.

The enduring testimony of the Philippian believers will assure Paul that he has

not “labored in vain,” that his work among them has been fruitful. Though his life may be poured out as a sacrifice for his faith, he will rejoice with them in the security of God’s provision for His saints. Paul gave of himself for them; he will give himself for his Saviour.

For thought and discussion

1. What elements are essential for harmony in the Christian community? Discuss.
2. What (so often) stands in the way of our esteeming others better than ourselves? What is the antidote?
3. It is impossible for us to adequately understand the mind of Christ. But we can observe His example of life. The question is, are we willing to follow the example of service and sacrifice He gave us?
4. How do we “work out” our salvation? Discuss.
5. What is necessary for us to effectively “hold forth the word of life”? (It’s here in the context.)
6. We look at salvation as a gift, and it is. But it came at great cost. Are we willing to pay the ultimate price in order to maintain it personally, and to share it with others? Our answer will say much about how serious we are with our professed faith. Think about it.

Lesson emphasis: Living faithfully and harmoniously in Christian community and being a faithful witness in the dark world around us.

Key verses: 3 and 15

AUGUST 15, 2010

Pressing Toward the Goal

Philippians 3:4b-16

As Paul appears to begin winding down his letter to the Philippian church, he launches into a description of his pedigree. At first glance we may wonder why, or at least feel it is out of place. However, if we

examine the several verses prior to our text, his motive becomes clearer. Paul’s ministry was continually plagued by Judaizers, those who insisted that Jewish ceremonial rites should be required of Gentiles coming to faith in Christ. Obviously this teaching was threatening the unity of the church at Philippi.

Paul refutes their argument by listing his pure Jewish pedigree, his education as a Pharisee, his former zeal in persecuting the church of Christ, and his compliance with the requirements of the law. It’s an impressive list. Paul was an intelligent, highly educated, zealous and pious Jew. But then he goes on to say that as impressive as his resumé might be, it really counted for nothing as far as gaining favor with God was concerned. He called it rubbish.

Works-righteousness, the efforts of man, avail nothing in securing favor with God. It is the “righteousness which is of God by faith” that secures position with Him. Paul was willing to lay aside all human accomplishments and pedigree in order to know the power of the resurrection operative in his life. Paul here lays down for the Philippian believers the timeless principle that it is the pursuit of holiness that leads to a right relationship with God—not pedigree, not works, not pride in position or human accomplishments.

Paul’s consuming passion was to know Christ experientially, intellectually, practically. He was willing to suffer, to die, in order to be sure of the resurrection experience with Christ. Nothing really mattered to him except a fuller knowledge of Christ and the assurance of being with Him eternally. His whole life was directed toward that goal.

Paul recognized that he had not yet arrived at the point of perfection, but was continually pressing on to reach the ultimate goal for which Christ had laid hold on him. Here was a man who, though already giving all to the cause for which Christ had apprehended him, was always eager to do more. Not to gain favor, but to honor the

call of Christ in his life. In this striving for conformity to Christ, Paul placed no inherent value on previous achievements or accident of birth. Certainly the benefits of life fitted him and enabled him in fulfilling Christ's calling. But he placed no value on those things as far as merit with God was concerned. He didn't look back, his eyes were on the prize at the end of life's race—God's call to Heaven through the merits of His Son, Paul's Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul challenges and calls the Philippian believers to the same earnest endeavor he exhibits. If they are honest in their endeavor, God will reveal any areas of life needing attention. But, Paul says, don't rest on your laurels, don't be satisfied with current achievement or progress, keep pressing on: the prize is at the end of the race. And it is well worth the struggle.

For thought and discussion

1. Few of us can boast the credentials of Paul. However, we may be prone to take pride in our heritage or achievements. Can you, can I, truthfully say with Paul "what things were gain to me, I count as loss for Christ's sake"?
2. Conversely, are we fully utilizing the abilities and privileges God has given us for the sake of His program?
3. None of us have had the dramatic encounter with Christ Paul experienced. How does such an experience relate to being "sold out" for Christ? Discuss.
4. Discuss practical ways of "pressing toward the mark." What is involved? (See Hebrews 12:1-3.)
5. There is benefit in periodically evaluating our spiritual progress and status. Let this lesson challenge you to do so, and then to make any adjustments necessary to unhindered progress.

Lesson emphasis: The challenge to be "sold out" for Christ, to use all available resources for the advancement of His cause, and to press forward with unflagging zeal toward our heavenly home.

Key verses: 13 and 14

PAGE 8

AUGUST 22, 2010

Steadfastness in the Lord's Work

Philippians 4:1-14

Chapter 3 closes with warnings against those who are "enemies of the cross of Christ" and encouragement to be faithful to the One who will ultimately redeem believers to Heaven. As Chapter 4 begins, Paul continues his call for steadfastness using terms as "my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and my crown." These Philippian believers meant much to Paul and he desired their faithfulness to be the crown of his ministry. The following comments and corrections were all aimed toward their maintaining impetus toward that goal.

Even Christians are not above disagreement and controversy, so Paul encourages two prominent women at Philippi to "be of the same mind in the Lord." He calls on his "true yokefellow," whose identity is unknown, to assist these sparring women to put aside "all jealousy and ill will and, in a spirit of humility and charity resolve to understand each other and to seek for mutual amity and peace" (Erdman). Paul also fondly remembers other of the Philippian believers who had labored with him in establishing the church at Philippi.

Paul then launches into a series of admonitions intended to encourage faithful living among the Philippian believers. They were to rejoice in the Lord continually. They were to exhibit a spirit of gentleness or consideration toward all men. For a reason he reminds them that "the Lord is at hand. In light of the pending Parousia believers were to maintain a constant attitude of tolerance, respect, and right relationship toward all men. They were to live in an attitude of dependence on God, not in anxiety or fretfulness. Such living will assure the peace of God in their hearts.

Then in verse 8 Paul gives us that

SWORD AND TRUMPET

classic verse on proper thinking. Since there is virtue in these principles, meditating on and applying them to one's life will provide an enhancing quality to life and relationships. The things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and admirable will add dimensions of wholeness and praise to life. Paul says doing the things they have been taught and have seen exemplified in his life will assure them of the continuing presence of the God of peace.

Paul closes this chapter, and letter, by thanking the church at Philippi for their remembrance of him resulting in multiple gifts to supply his needs (read the rest of the chapter). The immediate thanksgiving is for the gift which occasioned this letter (see verse 18). He recognizes their ongoing concern but also their lack of opportunity at times to provide for his needs.

However, he assures them, he is not saying this simply to play on their emotions or to suggest a need. Through life, in varied circumstances and situations, he has learned contentment whether with much or with little. The source of his contentment and dependence is Christ. He is the One who both provides and enables in his ministry. He provides the strength and courage to move forward regardless of the circumstances or outlook. Nevertheless, Paul tells the Philippian believers, you did well in sharing with me in my time of need. In so doing you accepted my affliction as your own. Paul assures them that as they have supplied his need, God will also supply theirs (v. 19).

So we come to the close of this very personal, yet encouraging, letter displaying Paul's concern for his converts and assuring them of God's continued blessing on their faithfulness.

For thought and discussion

1. What level of personal disagreement can be tolerated within the Christian brotherhood and at what point does it begin to affect harmony and unity?

Discuss, carefully.

2. What is the key to living above anxiety, with full dependence upon God? (See Matthew 6:33.) How did Paul do it?
3. Think about how our thought life affects other areas of life and relationships.
4. The effects of giving go both ways. How does it affect the recipient? the giver?
5. Stories abound about how God has met specific needs at specific times among His children. Perhaps you have experienced such blessing. Sharing with your class may encourage others.

Lesson emphasis: Steadfastness, carefulness, satisfaction, and generosity in the Christian life.

Key verses: 6 and 7

AUGUST 29, 2010

In Defense of the Gospel

Acts 28:16-25a, 28-31

The Apostle Paul's story begins in Acts 8 and continues through the Book of Acts. Events leading up to his imprisonment in Rome begin in Chapter 21. Today's lesson gives us details of his arrival in Rome as a prisoner and his ministry there over a period of two years. The story ends abruptly and we wish we knew more. But Acts is not primarily Paul's story but the account of the spread of the early church. However, Paul played a significant role in this movement and even though now confined to house arrest in Rome, his ministry continued.

We note from Paul's letter to the Philippians that his influence reached into Caesar's court and undoubtedly touched many of the Praetorian guardsmen to whom he was chained day and night. Our text tells us that he was free to receive guests and preach and teach concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. And we should not forget that four of his epistles which continue to teach and challenge believers today were written during this

time of Roman imprisonment. Paul was a man who could rise above his circumstances to continue the ministry to which God had called him.

Soon after Paul's arrival in Rome he called in the chief Jewish leaders for a get-acquainted session. He assured them of his respect for the Jewish nation and their customs, and that he intended no harm toward them. He also told them something of his circumstances and how he had arrived at this point as a prisoner. These leaders told him they had no advance information on him but were eager to hear more from him regarding "this sect that is everywhere spoken against." Paul, ever eager to present Christ as the hope of Israel, set a date for them to return for further discussion.

On the given day many assembled with Paul to hear his apologia for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul drew from the law and the prophets to prove Christ as the fulfillment and embodiment of the Old Testament references to Messiah. No doubt there was questioning and debate among those assembled. At least some believed, though some did not. Paul was used to that. And it was on that note of disagreement that the assembly broke up. One can easily imagine that Paul was both gratified by the positive response and sorrowful that not all accepted his premise.

The Jews' rejection, apparently the larger portion of the group, gave Paul the liberty to present the message of Christ to the Gentiles. From previous experience he knew they would accept the message without prejudice. So for the two years of his confinement he continued to preach and teach to all who would come, without hindrance. Likely, although a prisoner, the fact that Paul was paying for his own quarters, gave him liberties he would not have had in an imperial prison.

So finally Paul was in Rome, although not in the manner he had previously envisioned. He had written to the Roman Christians, probably about three years earlier, of his desire to visit them and

"impart some spiritual gift" to them to establish them in the faith. Now he was there and although restricted by captivity he was free to preach and teach.

Although the account ends abruptly, it is likely that Paul was released from this imprisonment and continued to travel and preach for several years before his final imprisonment and subsequent execution. But though Paul's story ends, his influence continues to this day, for which all Christians are grateful.

For thought and discussion

1. Be sure to review the background for Paul's arrival in Rome and observe the Lord's hand in preserving him enroute for his ministry there.
2. During his imprisonment, at least six of Paul's travel companions and co-laborers spent time with him. Think about the obvious ways this would have helped Paul and helped to save him from discouragement. Use it as a lesson to encourage and support those of your acquaintance involved in ministry.
3. Where did Paul get the resources to maintain a personal household in Rome? (See Philippians 4:18.) What does this teach us about being sensitive to our brothers' needs?
4. How often most of us would just give up in less adverse circumstances than Paul faced. Allow his drive and dedication to be an example to you to forge ahead in the Lord's work regardless of seeming defeat.
5. Ponder how God at times puts us in what we consider less than ideal circumstances in order to provide a special platform for ministry. Discuss the positive implications of Paul's imprisonment.

Lesson emphasis: Diligence in doing God's work regardless of seeming adverse circumstances.

Key verses: 30 and 31

Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

incidents events occurrences facts illustrations episodes committees vignettes proceedings problems
experiences crises adventures transactions meetings tragedies scoops reports conferences happenings
bulletins questions reports affairs dramas encounters personages actions tidings et cetera

Quote of the Month: Conscientious Objector

“Fear used to grip my mind. And I was so afraid that I joined the army to kill those I feared, so that they couldn't come to America to kill me. My actions have hurt many people and I finally realize that if anything makes sense in this world, it is love, not just for people I like, but love for all.”

—Josh Stieber, former Army specialist, Iraq war veteran-turned-conscientious objector

—Source: “The Conscientious Objector” (<http://j.mp/bbAeOj>) in *Voice of America: In Their Own Words*

* * * * *

North Korea Sub Torpedos Warship

In March, a North Korean submarine fired a torpedo at a South Korean warship, sinking it and killing 46 sailors. The ships were in South Korean waters. An international team of investigators examined the evidence (including sonar recordings and fragments from a North Korean-made torpedo) and showed it publicly showing conclusively it was a North Korean sub that fired the torpedo. North Korea has threatened war with South Korea if it is punished for this act. China has called the act “unfortunate” but has remained on the sidelines, seemingly protecting (as usual) its longtime Communist ally. China fears any reprimand which would lead to a collapse of Kim Jong Il's regime in NK would lead to an unstoppable mass exodus of

refugees across the Chinese border. The US intelligence community released an assessment that the order to sink the ship came from Kim Jong Il himself in order to cement the succession of his son to the leadership of NK when the aging KJI dies.

—Sources: *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*

* * * * *

Solitary Confinement for Religious Conviction

“Kendall Gibson would seem to be one of Virginia's most dangerous prisoners.

“For more than 10 years he has lived in segregation at the Greenville Correctional Center, spending at least 23 hours every day in a cell the size of a gas station bathroom. In a temporary home for the worst of the worst—inmates too violent or disruptive to live among the rest of society's outcasts—he has been a permanent fixture.

“He is there, he says, not for his crimes but for a crime he will not commit—a crime against God.

“The only thing imposing about Gibson is his long black dreadlocks, resting on the front of his shoulders so they won't drag the ground as he shuffles along in his orange jumpsuit.

“It is his hair—winding locks he considers a measure of his Rastafarian faith—that makes him a threat, according to Virginia Department of Corrections Operating Procedure No. 864.1.

“The rule took effect on Dec. 15, 1999. Inmates had two choices: cut their hair no longer than their collars and shave their beards, or be placed in administrative segregation.

“ ‘People always ask how I can smile in a place so negative,’ he says. ‘The Rastafarian God, Jah, is my answer. Without Jah in my life I wouldn’t be able to handle it.’

“Like most of the Rastafarians in segregation, Gibson didn’t become a believer until after he entered prison. He was 18 and had a long time to do, sentenced to 47 years on robbery, abduction, and gun charges.

“Rastafari draws from the Bible, mixing in African and Caribbean cultural influences. It is considered by many more of a way of life or movement than a religion. They preach unity with god, nature and each other, but are loosely organized and followers are free to worship with other congregations.

“Rastafarians regard Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I, who was known as Ras Tafari before he rose to power in 1930, as the second coming of Christ. They believe Jah inhabits them so there is no real need for a church. They smoke marijuana as a sacrament and adhere to a vegetarian diet.

“While some view growing their hair as optional, most Rastafarians see it as demanded by the Nazarite Vow in the Bible (Numbers 6:5), ‘There shall no razor come upon his head.’

“The segregation unit has 16 cells, and although the inmates can’t see each other they often talk. Gibson is amazed at what he calls their pure confusion and senseless babbling—obsession with the lives of movie stars and rappers and sports figures.”

We can learn a number of things from this story. The first is the increasing number of religious movements that freely mix truth and error, Bible and extra-Biblical traditions.

The second is that we should avoid falling into the trap of making statements

like, “Such endurance of persecution/hardship can come *only* through the power of God.” It is appropriate to credit the power of God for persecution endurance, but let’s not make exclusive statements that disregard the power of human stubbornness and sincerely mistaken convictions. This is especially apparent as we observe Islamist suicide/homicide bombers.

Thirdly, in cases of religious confusion (of mixing Biblical truth with error) we should be very wary of making strong statements either way about a person’s salvation. The Bible gives stern warnings (Rom. 2:1-5) about not judging someone’s eternal destiny. We should couch our thoughts and comments in the form of judging specific actions and beliefs according to the Biblical standard. For instance, pointing to Jesus’ words in Mark 13:21-22a “And then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ’; or, ‘Behold, He is there’; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise . . .” (NASB) and saying that it’s a false belief that Ras Tafari is Christ. On the other hand, because the Bible says (Rom. 3:20; 7:7-9) that imputation of sin comes only through knowledge of the law (which we all have in differing levels [Luke 12:48]; also, deception means a lack of knowledge of the law) we should not judge someone’s destiny, only point them to specific points in which they are not following God.

—Excerpt from “Rasta inmates spend 10 years in isolation for hair” (<http://j.mp/di4CZ5>) in AP

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Israel Ambushed by “Aid Flotilla”

Israel and Egypt maintain a joint blockade of the Gaza Strip to prevent weapons from entering. A recent “aid flotilla” filled with “peace” activists and Turkish Islamists with Al Qaeda and Hamas ties tried to run the naval blockade to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza.

The Israeli government asked them to dock in an Israeli port where the cargo would be off-loaded, inspected for weapons, and then sent overland to Gaza. Egypt

made a similar offer. (Previous flotillas have been taken over by Israeli authorities, redirected to port, and supplies were sent to Gaza.) However, the goal of the flotilla was clearly not delivering supplies, but rather creating an international incident in order to stop the blockade.

Despite statements by the flotilla before they set sail that they would not resist, as soon as Israeli commandos, armed with nonlethal paintball guns and stun grenades, fast-roped down from helicopters, they were set upon by iron-bar and knife-wielding “peace activists” who beat and stabbed the soldiers to a bloody pulp. The soldiers continued to use nonlethal force until some of the activists threw a soldier to a lower deck 30 ft. below and pulled a pistol from a soldier’s holster and began to open fire on the soldiers. The soldiers finally responded by pulling out their own pistols (issued for last-resort “life-threatening” self-defense) and opening fire at the activists’ legs. This account is confirmed by a dramatic YouTube video (<http://j.mp/b3Qr91>).

Ten activists, mostly Turkish Islamists with Al Qaeda ties, were killed (60 activists and 10 IDF soldiers were wounded). The world has responded by almost universally condemning Israeli actions.

The peace activists’ motivation in provoking this incident is laid forth by William Jacobson: “The flotilla was organized by the Islamist government in Turkey to aid Hamas with the goal of opening up shipping channels for Turkey’s new friend, Iran, to ship more and better weapons as it is doing to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran is busy turning Lebanon and Syria into one large missile launching pad against Israel, and a southern base in Gaza will complete the encirclement of Israel for the coming crisis over Iran’s nuclear program. The Europeans on the ships were cover, and the placement of an 18-month-old child on these ships was the utmost cynical use of a human shield. [O]nly sea-based shipping would provide Iran with the mechanism for almost unlimited armament of Hamas.

There is a limit to the quantity and size of missiles and other armaments which can be smuggled through tunnels from Egypt. That is why the sea blockade must be broken for Iran to get what it wants.”

* * * * *

News Tidbits

AP: “A Libyan plane carrying 104 people crashed on approach to Tripoli’s airport. . . . A 10-year-old Dutch boy was the only known survivor.”

CNN: “The Congressional Budget Office has doubled the estimated increases of some costs resulting from the sweeping health care reform legislation passed this year . . . the first 10 years under the new legislation could exceed \$115 billion.”

New York Times: “After four years of maintaining his innocence about doping charges that ruined his reputation and caused him to be stripped of his 2006 Tour de France title, the American cyclist [and former conservative Mennonite] Floyd Landis . . . admits using performance-enhancing drugs for most of his career. Landis accused other top American cyclists . . . including Armstrong, of using performance-enhancing drugs and methods.”

AP: “Texas schoolchildren will be required to learn that the words ‘separation of church and state’ aren’t in the Constitution and evaluate whether the United Nations undermines U. S. sovereignty under new social studies curriculum. In final votes late Friday, conservatives on the State Board of Education strengthened requirements on teaching the Judeo-Christian influences of the nation’s Founding Fathers and required that the U.S. government be referred to as a ‘constitutional republic’ rather than ‘democratic.’ ”

Feedback: hansmast@hansmast.com

Should Christians Be Diligent Obeyers?

by Simon Schrock

Periodically I hear of some ladies getting together to do “scrapbooking.” They are putting together some history and things they want to remember.

After the children of Israel had wandered through the wilderness and desert for forty years, they finally came near the Promised Land. While on the east side of the Jordan River, in view of the Promised Land, Moses reviewed their forty-year history. He referred to the mighty acts of God that delivered them from slavery. He reviewed God’s laws for the people and His faithful love and promises. He reminded them that in order to receive these promises, they must decide to walk the path of obedience. They were instructed to not only obey, but to instruct their children and make sure they understood God’s principles and indeed pass them on to the next generation.

Indeed, Moses’ Deuteronomy “scrapbook” is an enlightening and interesting read. Recently while again reading through this book of history, rereading Moses “scrapbook,” several words really got my attention.

1. In Chapter 8:11, Moses reminds the people to “beware.” “Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.” Here is the relevant point: by not faithfully keeping God’s commandments the people tend to forget. Keeping His commandments is a daily reminder of their miraculous delivery from Egypt.
2. There are noteworthy words in

Deuteronomy 10:12, 13. “*And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good.*” For thy good! God’s laws and commandments were really for their good. It was the best way for them to live. By careful obedience they can expect to live under God’s blessing.

3. In Deuteronomy 28:1, 2 Israel is given a promise and a clear path to being under God’s blessing. “*And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt **hearken diligently** unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: and all **these blessings** shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.*”

For Israel to receive God’s blessings it required their *diligent obedience*. From these Scriptures we see Israel is reminded to be aware, and the commands are for their good. If they diligently obey, they are promised God’s blessings.

In verses 3-13, Moses lists blessing after blessing that God will give them—“*And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them*” (Deuteronomy 28:14).

The rich blessings of the Lord came through careful and diligent obedience. As Solomon wrote, *“The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it”* (Proverbs 10:22).

The other side of God’s promises begins at verse 15 of Deuteronomy 28—*“But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.”*

Beginning at verse 16 through verse 68, God promises them that bitter curses will fall on them if they disobey. (There are 52 verses describing these curses.) He gave them this “cursing promise” in verse 25: *“The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.”*

A visit to the Holocaust Museum reveals the audacity of the Nazis’ horrendous treatment of the Jews. The Nazis slaughtered over 6 million Jews—men, women, and children. Rudolf Hoes testified at the Nuremberg trials that over 1.5 million persons were executed at Auschwitz, one of the huge gas chambers built for mass execution of Jews. He testified that 500,000 more were starved to death. Visiting the museum invokes a host of emotions—sorrow, empathy, anger, to name a few. Deep sympathy for the suffering of the Jewish people, feelings of anger—how could a national leader be so ruthless? It is helpful for me to carefully read Deuteronomy 28 before visiting the museum. It helps temper my emotions as I reflect on this horrible time in history. I ask myself, was God keeping His promises of curses for disobedience?

Deuteronomy is a book of history and commandments for God’s people—Israel. How does this apply to the New Testament church? That is the Old Covenant with God and His people, and we are under the new covenant of grace.

What is God’s message to the New Testament church for this period of grace. Has God changed His mind about the people of faith diligently obeying His commands?

The New Testament contains hundreds of commandments. Try an experiment. Read Christ’s entire Sermon on the Mount as recorded by Matthew—Matthew 5, 6, and 7. Then list all the commandments in just this one sermon. Listing them all would make an impressive list. Here is a small sample:

- *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (v. 16).
- *“Swear not at all”* (v. 34).
- *“Love your enemies”* (v. 44).
- *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth”* (6:19).
- *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God”* (6:33).
- *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them”* (7:12).

Jesus concluded the sermon with a warning—*“And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it”* (Matthew 7:26, 27).

“Heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not.” That sounds similar to what God told Israel. *“Great was the fall of it,”* does not sound like a blessing.

Are the New Testament commands “for thy good”? Jesus said, *“Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it”* (Luke 11:28). The Amplified says, *“Obey and practice it.”* NAS says, *“Observe it.”*

Don was an elder in his evangelical type church. He saw much looseness about holiness in his congregation. He loved God and experienced His grace. Don’s conscience called him to a more careful obedience to God and to His Word. He visited a congregation that

practiced some of the New Testament teachings that were missing in his church. Washing one another's feet, non-wearing of jewelry, and the sisters' veiling were some of them. He raised the issue with his pastor and asked why they are not obeying these Scriptures. The pastor's response was, "That's legalism. Where is the grace of God in that?"

What about the accusation against diligent obeyers being legalistic? That depends on why you obey. Legalism is trusting your good works to make you right with God. The Bible makes it clear that our salvation doesn't come by keeping all the commandments of the Bible. The Apostle Paul gives clarity to that in Ephesians 2:8, 9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

Where do good works and faithful obedience come in? In the very next verse he reminds believers that we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works and we should walk in them. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). This passage is material for a five-point sermon.

1. We are God's workmanship, "masterpiece." He made us.
2. We are created anew in Christ Jesus. New creatures! "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).
3. Created anew to good works.
4. God ordained this long ago. "But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel" (Isaiah 29:23).
5. That we should walk in them.

God ordained that believers walk in good works, obedient to His teachings. Good works demonstrate the teachings,

and the teachings interpret the good works. We are to behave our beliefs. Paul reminds us that it is "not the hearers of the law [that] are just before God, but the doers of the law [that] shall be justified" (Romans 2:13).

We are commanded to be doers of the word and not just hearers. "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

James also reminds us that faith without works is dead. "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20).

Faith and works must be held together. While diligent obeyers are often called legalists, a lot of disobedience is being swept under a rug called grace. There are broad claims by professing believers that God's grace will cover for willful disobedience of Scripture.

However, believers should be aware that the grace of God calls for holy and righteous living. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11, 12).

Whatever you make of grace it is the grace of God that teaches us to live upright and godly lives. God told Israel that His commandments were for their good. Jesus told His followers they would be blessed for keeping the word.

"This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men" (Titus 3:8).

My faith and hope for salvation is in Christ Jesus. In response to this gift, God expects my obedience. He wants willful obedience that does not test His grace to see what I can get by with. I gladly and willingly am committed to obedience, and Jesus calls that "blessed." ■



Sermon of the Month



Each month we will feature a Biblical sermon in this column. We would like to emphasize expository preaching and ask our readers to submit good expository sermons for consideration. Please send typewritten copies by "snail mail" or E-mail to: Editor, Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803; swandtrump@verizon.net.

Living the Life of Jesus

by F. B. Meyer

"As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me" (John 6:57).

An eastern prince was accustomed to retire for an hour every morning to a certain chamber in his palace, which was carefully reserved from every common eye, and in which he said that he found the secret of his life. When the room was entered, it was discovered that it was furnished like a shepherd's hut, for his forefathers were shepherds. There, with the most simple surroundings, he had been accustomed quietly to meditate upon his past, his present, and his future.

I want to conduct you into Christ's inner chamber in which His spirit dwelt, and the door of which He has left open for us, that we also may enter and dwell there. I desire to give you what seems to me the one secret of our Saviour's life, that it may likewise become the one secret of yours and mine. From the words of our text we may infer that what the Father was to Jesus, Jesus is willing to be to you and to me. Everything that Jesus said of His relationship to the Father, we may say of our relationship to Jesus.

The Gospel of John is peculiarly the book of our Saviour's inner life, and the book of our own inner life, because in the place of the Father we may substitute the

Saviour's name. Thus we may read the words of our text, "As the living Saviour hath sent me, so I live by the Saviour." If you take that Gospel according to John and substitute Christ for the Father, and hang on Christ as Christ hung on God, you will hardly ever need a book of private devotion other than that which is furnished by the golden book of the inner life, yielded in St. John's gospel.

Christ's Selflessness

The first truth to which I wish to call your attention is this: *Our Saviour might have lived an independent life.*

He was the Holy One before He stooped to us and laid aside the use of the attributes of His Godhead. During His human life He might at any moment have availed Himself of His divine attributes and might have lived His human life in the power of them. Whenever He was hungry, instead of waiting for Peter or others to provide, He might have used His creative power to transform the very stones into loaves of bread.

Had He so chosen, He might have planned His own life and from the transfiguration mountain have stepped into

paradise. He might have spoken His own words and have poured forth upon men such a flood of eloquence as would have shone on the pages of literature with dazzling brilliancy. He might have done His work by His own power, working His miracles merely to increase His own reputation. He might have sought His own glory as the supreme end of His life, so displaying His power and glory that His divinity should be apparent to all.

His Servant Life

Our Lord Jesus might have lived an independent life, and second, *Satan was always urging Him to do it.*

Straight from the river Jordan Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. You who have been baptized for service are almost certain to be led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted, just because God desires to do a mighty work in your soul. The oak, which is to live for a hundred years, must be rooted and moored to stand the storm, and God, wanting you to become a strong, sturdy oak, will most certainly lead you into temptations. Temptation is not sin if the temptation is resisted. The effect of being tempted is to root us more in Christ.

The first thing the devil said to Jesus was, "Thou art the Son of God. God has just owned thee as such, as the second person of the holy Trinity. Thou hast all power. Now use that power for Thyself, and make these stones bread."

That was the crucial point in our Lord's life, and He said, "No: I am going to be a dependent human being. Inasmuch as those whom I have come to save depend upon my Father and upon Me, I will learn what it is to depend by faith absolutely upon my Father. If my Father does not feed Me, I will die of hunger. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God, and I am going to wait for my Father to speak."

When our Lord said that He at once definitely refused to live the independent life

which would have been possible, and elected to live a life of constant dependence upon the Father.

Our Lord's Life

Look at our Lord's life. In His birth God the Father gave Him life. It was not His own life; He could not do as He liked with it, and after He had lived it for thirty-three years the Father asked again for that life. And Jesus in dying said, "Father, receive my life." It might have seemed that from the moment when He descended into the grave there was no longer any life for Him, but through the cross He came into a richer life than ever. He gave up the natural to get the eternal; He gave up the life of the flesh to receive the life of the Spirit; He gave up the life that could die, that He might receive the resurrection life of power to impart.

Jesus Christ held His life in trust,—God gave it, God maintained it, God required it, and all the time the Son said to the Father, "I live by thee." God was as much the breath of Christ's life as the air is of our natural life. It was as if His natural life kept saying to God, "May I live another hour?" and the Father said, "Live." Every minute the attitude of Christ was taking, taking, taking life from the Father. So we should live; always drawing from Christ, the fountain of life: always receiving from God life for our life. We must live because of Jesus.

So in the *plan* of our Lord's life. Sometimes He said to His disciples, "Let us go across the lake and rest." He might have chosen to pursue that plan of rest, but when the people hurried around the lake and asked to be taught and fed, in their intrusion on His quiet He saw the Father's plan. Once when He was going to Jairus' home, a woman who had an issue of blood stopped Him, I know not for how long, and in the touch of her finger He saw the intrusion of the Father's plan for the day, and He stopped His own plan to follow it.

In that wonderful fifth chapter of John, He says, "The Son can originate nothing—

the Son can do nothing from Himself—but what He sees the Father doing.” When He was in Joseph’s shop, as a young boy of twelve or fourteen, and saw Joseph making yokes for the oxen, He studied how Joseph made them, and fashioned the yoke on which He was working like it—always copying Joseph. Then afterward when He came to live among men, He was always watching for the development of the Father’s plan, and the things which God did in the unseen and eternal world, Jesus did in His earthly life. So this plan was the plan of God.

Jesus also depended on the Father for *His words*. In one of the most beautiful translations of the Revised Version in the fiftieth chapter of Isaiah we are told that God the Father came every morning to the Son and awakened Him, whispering into His ear the words which He was to say during the day, so that as Jesus went forth to teach the people day by day He did not speak His own words, but the words which the Father gave Him. On the mountain of beatitudes, when He finished one paragraph, I suppose that He would look up and say, “What next?” And that wonderful farewell discourse recorded in John consisted of the words of the Father received by Jesus as He spoke them.

Then as to *His miracles*. In that wonderful fourteenth chapter of John, Jesus says, “The words that I say unto you, I speak not from myself, but the Father abiding in me, doeth his works.” We might almost say that we do not know Jesus, because He was so completely dependent upon the Father that His words were the Father’s, His works were the Father’s, His life was the Father’s, and in Jesus we do not see Jesus but we see the Father mirrored in His words and works and life.

So also about *His will*. He had a will of His own, because He said, “Not my will.” We do not understand the mystery of His nature but we remember that He said, “Not my will but thine be done.”

We know, too, how He sought *the Father’s glory*. He said, “I have glorified

thee on earth. It matters little what men say or think of me, I at least have given them a new thought about thyself. I have glorified thee on the earth”; and He promised to answer our prayers, “that the Father might be glorified in the Son.”

Now He is there in the glory waiting to find a prayer that we have uttered that He can answer to glorify His Father; He at once answers that kind of a prayer, because He is so set on this purpose. In that last prayer He also said, “I would like to be glorified, my Father; give me glory that the Son may glorify thee.” It was as if Jesus Christ was only ambitious to be well thought of in order that He might make God the Father the better considered.

What the Lord Chose

My fourth point obviously is this: If our blessed Lord chose this life of dependence out of all possible lives that He might have lived, *does it not seem wisest, most blessed, most Christlike, for you and me to give up living the independent life in the flesh and to begin from this moment to depend upon Christ as Christ depended upon God?*

If Jesus Christ held His life moment by moment in the balance at God’s dictation, should not we receive the help and expend our life as Jesus wills? If Jesus Christ allowed His plan always to give way to God’s plan, do you not see that instead of scheming, planning, and striving to get our own way so much, we ought always to be looking out for God’s plan and to yield submissively before it? If Jesus Christ gave up His words for the words which the Father put into His lips, do we not greatly mistake in trying to elaborate our sentences and beautify them, instead of day by day waiting to receive the words our Saviour gives us? If you would depend day by day on the Master for the power of His life, opening all your being, and preferring the power imparted to any power of your own, I need not say how your life would at once become divine.

Let us receive from our glorified Lord that life-power with which He is invested,

that He may glorify and ennoble our daily existence. Let us so dress, so adorn our houses, so spend our time, so earn money, that men may think better of our Lord. We should not expend one hour for any other purpose than that our life might be glorifying Jesus Christ for being, or doing, or suffering, or giving—the four departments of Christ's life.

Do you not see the beauty of having such a life that you might yield it back into the ocean from whence it came? Do you not see this great prerogative of your manhood given to you that you may give it back again? We have been so foolish in the past that we have thought that whatever gifts have been entrusted to us, must be clung to or lost; forgetting that it is only those who give away what they have, who really keep and get the best.

We have clung to our money, forgetting that by giving it away we shall get something better. We have clung to sermons with their eloquence, their chastity of expression, not realizing that just as soon as we give away the human power we get the divine power. We are so afraid of giving away what was only given to us as a trust, that we fail to get what God plans to bestow. I hear my Saviour singing as He goes down into the grave, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in death, nor suffer thy holy one to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life. In thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures forevermore." And so He goes down into the valley of death singing, and we know that in death He finds something better than He left.

The Saviour's Method

My fifth point is this: *The Saviour's method may be ours*. There are two possible methods. Our Lord might always have been crucifying, as it were, His human nature; but He chose the second method and the better one—that of living a life of perfect communion with God by the Holy Ghost. "I love the Father." "That the world may know that I love the Father."

Do you think that there was any difficulty, any agony except once in the supreme act of all when He was called upon to contemplate the possibility of losing the Father's smile? As the thought of being forsaken by the Father came over His soul, a dark eclipse, He said, "Save me from that"; but soon He said, "Not my will even in this, but thine be done."

Jesus loved the Father, and there is no difficulty in giving up the self-life when you are in love with the living Christ. The thing for us to do therefore is, not to dwell on the crucifixion, on the giving-up side, but to allow our whole nature to be drawn to the living Christ—not death, but life. Moreover, seek that abounding life which makes it so easy to say No to self. Make the living Jesus the reality of your whole life. Go about saying, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

How can Jesus become to me what the Father was to Jesus?

First: *We must be quiet; we must wait*.

In all music there are rests and sometimes whole bars of rests; so there must be in every life the sitting down quietly and allowing God by the Spirit to make Jesus dwell in us. Jesus often went up on the mountains with the thought of God the Father filling His nature, and there must be times in our life when we give an opportunity for Christ to assert Himself and impress Himself absorbingly on the vision.

Then second: *Be sure to make Jesus the first of everything*.

Remember the first words in our Bible—"In the beginning God." The story of every day ought to be commenced with the words, In the beginning Jesus. He must be the alpha, the first, the beginning. If, before you rush into a new enterprise, my brother, you would sit quietly down and be sure Jesus Christ is first, it would save you from landing in many a quagmire. Make Jesus first of every plan, every act, every sermon, everything that can be begun, continued, and ended in Him.

Third: *Make the glory of Jesus your aim.*

You may not *feel* it to be your aim, but *choose* it to be your aim. Always remember this great principle of the Christian's life, that when you cannot feel a thing, you must choose it by act of your will, and then ask God to create in you the emotion which you have chosen to be the motive of your action. Let the glory of Jesus be your aim in every service; let His glory be the thought that animates you in making money, in your housekeeping, in your mission work. Wives often send in requests for prayer for the conversion of their husbands, but frequently they desire it not for the glory of Christ, but that the husband may no longer bring misery and disaster into the life of the wife. We must put the glory of Christ even before the conversion of men.

Then fourth: *Meet God's will in every circumstance.*

I should like to draw a circle, the circle of God's will, and then step into it, and keep in it all my life; then whatever came to me must come through the encircling will of God. If Joseph's brethren put him in the pit, it is not they who sent him into Egypt, but God. If Judas brings the cup, Jesus says, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" When I am living in the will of God, my enemy may shoot an arrow against me; by the time it reaches me it may glance aside if God wills, but if He wishes it to strike me, by the time it reaches me it has become God's will for me.

Then lastly, *reckon on God.*

Some people are constantly worrying about their faith. I have given up worrying about my faith because I think of God's faithfulness. Begin to count God faithful. It is no use worrying whether I have strength enough to believe a note of hand; the question is, whether the man who signed that check is worthy of trust. Reckon on Christ's faithfulness toward you.

Go over these steps again: Be still.

Make Christ first in everything. Live absolutely for Him. Receive from Him all your words to speak, and works to do, all the power of your life; when in any emergency or need receive from Him, who sent the demand, the power to meet it. Reckon absolutely upon Christ. Meet His will in every circumstance. That is the way that Jesus lived toward His Father; live so toward Jesus.

You may ask me how it was that in the human nature of Christ He so absolutely yielded Himself to the Father. The answer comes from one of the most marvelous books in the Bible, the epistle of the Hebrews: "Who, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God."

I believe that that is what the baptism of Christ meant. At the moment of His baptism, Jesus did the very thing to His holy, independent life that you and I have been called to do to our natural, sinful, and debased life. The baptism of Jesus Christ, as I understand it, was His saying by symbol and metaphor, "I come to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart." Then on Him there came the blessed Holy Ghost, and it was in the power of the Spirit that He perpetually yielded Himself to God.

If you and I are to live toward Christ as Christ lived toward the Father, we must be baptized into the same Holy Ghost. Whatever your station or occupation may be, you may start to live that life right now, but you may lose the power to live it within twenty-four hours. The only power by which Jesus Christ can help your life is through the infilling of the Holy Ghost. Shall we not have done forever with the independent life and be able to say as never before, "The living Saviour hath sent me and He lives in me"? Then you will hear Him responding, "Because I live, ye shall live also." ■

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Counseling From the Word

"Why I Will Not Divorce My Husband"

as told by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

I think one of the most touching and powerful illustrations I've seen of a woman choosing to be a vow keeper in a culture of vow breakers is a dear friend of mine who I've known for many years and watched go through an extremely difficult situation in her marriage.

While she was in the midst of that situation, the woman who was counseling with her husband suggested that my friend should have divorced her husband because of his unrepentant sin. In response to that counselor's input, my friend wrote a piece. It's lengthy but I want to read it to you because I think it's such a powerful illustration of the ways of God. And she titled this piece **"Why I Will Not Divorce My Husband."** Let me just read it to you as she wrote it.

Nearly two years ago my husband told me that he had been involved in an adulterous affair with a younger woman for the past six months. That moment began a journey I never expected to take in my lifetime. I've chosen not to divorce my husband even though he refused to stop the affair for over a year after his initial confession.

Several people have questioned me about why I have made this choice. In fact, some just assumed that divorce would be an automatic response to his unfaithfulness to

me. When Steve [and that's not his real name, but I'll just call him that] and I were married almost 25 years ago, I made a covenant with him before God and our families and friends. That covenant as I repeated my vows, was "for better or for worse as long as we both shall live."

I realize that Steve has broken his part of that covenant; however, I do not believe this means I should divorce him and break my part of the covenant. I realize there are differing opinions on the scriptural basis for divorce. Many claim the "exception clause" in Matthew 19 as the only grounds for divorce. Others refer to 1 Corinthians 7 and claim abandonment as another ground for divorce. Yet in Matthew 19 when Jesus was confronted with this issue, He made it clear that God's plan for marriage is until death.

Later in the chapter when pressed further, Jesus replied that it was only because of hardness of heart the divorce was allowed, but "from the beginning it was not so." In Malachi 2:16, God says He hates divorce.

After studying these passages, it is obvious that **God's intent is that marriage should be for life.** Even Jesus did not say to divorce even when adultery has been committed. He reiterated the Father's heart for a lifetime covenant. I would find it very hard

to pursue something or to counsel someone to do something that God says He hates.

There are even some theologians who believe that the immorality or “fornication” to which Jesus refers [in that exception clause] had taken place in the betrothal or engagement period, allowing for the betrothed couple to be “divorced.”

In Ephesians 5 the marriage union is presented as a picture of Christ and the church. Think of the spiritual adultery and unfaithfulness we continually commit against our Saviour as part of His church—yet Christ never divorces us. He shows mercy, grace, and forgiveness to us no matter how unloving and unfaithful we are. **We may break our part of the covenant, but the covenant is still not dissolved because Christ keeps His covenant. His love and forgiveness draw our hearts back to Him.**

Yes, He definitely uses pain, sometimes through severe discipline, to bring godly sorrow and repentance. But He also uses His goodness or kindness to lead us to repentance. Based on these and other biblical principles, I’ve come to the conclusion in my heart that I cannot and will not divorce my husband. **I want to display the true picture of Christ and the church before my husband, our children, family, friends and the world. I want to have a heart like God’s concerning my marriage covenant.**

I can only come to the conclusion that His heart is marriage for life. As for the “exception clause” in Matthew 19, I think it is very possible that Jesus was not referring to adultery in marriage but to immorality during the engagement or betrothal period. All this does not excuse my husband’s sin or give him license to continue breaking his vow to me.

First Corinthians 7 speaks of the possibility of separation. I believe separation for a period of time is not unscriptural as long as the intent is to be restored. I had been at this point with Steve for a couple months prior to his stopping the affair.

There is great pain inflicted upon the

innocent mate when adultery has been committed. (Some of you know that all too well.) For me, the agony has been indescribable because I felt we had such a good marriage and such a close relationship before this happened. Steve and I were best friends, soul mates, lovers, and had a ministry team for Christ. So to be replaced by another and to experience continual rejection for over a year and a half is crushing. Some would say that this kind of pain is grounds for divorce.

But what am I teaching my children by getting out of a painful relationship? Do I show them that when times get tough you can run and try to find someone else who will make you happy and not hurt you? Or do I show them that **God never promises us happiness, but holiness. Do I show them by divorce that God is not strong enough to see me through pain and suffering or do I fling myself upon my Saviour and receive His strength and grace and show them He is enough?**

Do I present a picture of Christ and the church that is accurate—Christ never casting us off even when we sin greatly against Him? Or one that presents Christ putting us away when we break our covenant to Him?

John Piper makes this point in his book, **A Godward Life**. [And now she is quoting from that book.]

“Our culture has made divorce acceptable and therefore easier to justify on the basis of emotional pain. Historically, the misery of painful emotions was not a sanction for divorce in most cultures. Marriage durability—with or without emotional pain—was valued above emotional tranquility for the sake of the children, the stability of society, and in the case of Christians, for the glory of God. In Christianity such rugged and enduring marriages through pain and heartache are rooted in the marriage of God to His rebellious people whom He has never finally cast off.

“Covenants are broken because it feels good to free from the commitment. **Covenant breaking is a way of short-term pain reduction. But in the**

process of reducing our pain we destroy life.”

Pain-free relationships are assumed as a right. But God promises His people something better. “Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12, RSV).

*A few months ago, our son, who is 11, came to me and said that when he saw what his dad was doing to me and to him and to his sister, he initially decided he never wanted to get married. However, he went on to say that as he had watched me forgive his dad and show love and mercy over and over, **he decided he wants to get married so he can show that kind of commitment to his wife and children some day.** He wept as he told me this and thanked me for my example.*

I wept tears of gratitude to my Lord for allowing all the pain and sorrow I had experienced to be used for good in my son’s life already. I’ve experienced the broadest spectrum of emotions these past two years. I’ve wept many tears. At times I have felt crushed into powder.

Yet I believe everything God has allowed my children and me to go through has been meant for good and for His glory. I see it as a gift to be embraced, for my Father who allowed His Son to suffer so greatly for me would not allow anything in my life with intent to harm me but only to make me more like Himself.

I have blown it many times by some of my reactions and responses. I have been angry. At times I have been so deeply discouraged that I wanted to call it quits. I have been far from perfect through it all. Yet I have such a deep joy in knowing I have chosen to obey my Saviour no matter the cost.

Some have suggested that the only reason I have not divorced my husband is because I am insecure. I do not claim to be without insecurities. In fact, I don’t feel very secure in my husband’s love for me right now. I know his heart has been given

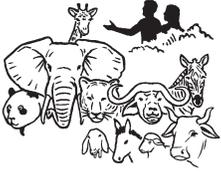
to another and I find myself grasping for assurance from him that he still loves me and wants me.

But one reason I have not pursued divorce is because of my security in Christ and in His love and faithfulness to me. He has taught me for many years that I must rest in Him and not only surrender to what He allows but accept and even embrace it. I find great security in this kind of rest in my Father’s choices for me.

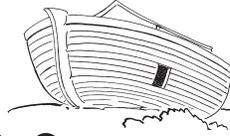
In fact, I have to sit back and marvel at it all. It is all Him and none of me. Throughout these painful months He has sustained and carried me even above my circumstances. His love has been so sweet and His Word so healing to my soul. I can only fall before Him in awe and gratitude that He saw fit to give me the privilege of suffering. To Him I give great glory and praise for what He has done and will continue to do.

I realize that I have no guarantee that my husband will ever love me the way he once did. I have known of people who have come through this kind of moral failure with more depth in their walk with Christ and ministry to others and with a deeper love for their spouse than ever before. That’s what I am praying and hoping for. But what if that never happens and Steve is never restored to the man he once was, or, as I pray, even better? Does that give me a basis to divorce him?

I believe not. My covenant with this man is rooted in Christ. I am in it for the long haul. All the hurt and rejection I have felt have not lessened my love for my husband. In fact, quite the opposite has happened. I knew I loved him but I never knew how much until this happened. God has given me a deeper understanding of what true love really is—His kind of love. I can only describe it as a fierce love that cannot give up on the one it loves and is committed to. I realize that great men of God disagree on the grounds of divorce. Who am I to tell them they are wrong? But I can only obey what I believe Scripture teaches on this issue. (continued on page 37)



Beginning Issues



Can Man Create Life?

by John Mullett

It's alive! Artificial DNA controls life"¹ screamed the title of an article recently on *msnbc.msn.com*. The Discovery Channel's title of the same article varied slightly, "It's Alive! Artificial Life Springs from Man-Made DNA"² and a subtitle that read, "A team of scientists create the first real-life 'Frankenstein' by injecting man-made DNA into a previously lifeless cell." The article started out with the following paragraph, "It may not quite be 'Frankenstein,' but for the first time scientists have created an organism controlled by completely human-made DNA." Wow, doesn't that catch your eye? Completely human-made DNA!

Here's more: "Using the tools of synthetic biology, scientists from the J. Craig Venter Institute installed a completely artificial genome inside a host cell without DNA. Like the bolt of lightning that awakened Frankenstein, the new genome invigorated the host cell, which began to grow and reproduce, albeit with a few problems. The research marks a technical milestone in the synthesis and implantation of artificial DNA. Venter expects the research will lead to cheaper drugs, vaccines, and bio-fuels in several years—and dozens of other companies and researchers are working toward the same goal."³

The work accomplished in this project is truly remarkable. I mean, "Wow, we can do that?" However, it's not quite as significant as the media may lead us to believe. Here is an excerpt from a response by *Answers in Genesis*: "Regardless of some hyped press reports, this research (brilliantly executed as it was) has nothing to do with evolution in

the molecules-to-man sense. Dr. Georgia Purdom, a molecular geneticist on our Answers in Genesis (AiG) staff, notes that there has merely been an alteration within a kind (at the family, genus, or species level). Even the researchers have acknowledged that this first synthetic cell is more a re-creation of existing life—changing one simple type of bacterium into another. While Venter claimed, 'We have passed through a critical psychological barrier. It has changed my own thinking, both scientifically and philosophically, about life, and how it works,' he was also quite clear⁴ that [his team] 'didn't create life from scratch.'⁵ It wasn't as though they just dreamt up their own DNA code. They were working with preexisting matter and they studied (and altered) the existing genome which allowed them to "customize" the genome they were building with ordinary chemicals.⁶

While the connections in the article were fairly subtle, inevitably accomplishments such as this one are linked to evolution, which seems rather curious to me. In spite of the intelligence invested (millions of dollars spent, fifteen years⁷ of hard work with untold numbers of failed experiments and massive amounts of accumulated data all driven by some of the smartest people on the planet) many look to results like this as evidence that life can arise without the presence of an intelligent being or God. That doesn't appear to be the primary motive of the scientists involved in this project and (ethics aside—that's for another discussion) their work could lead

(continued on page 27)



Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

“ . . . singing with understanding!”

Father, Whate'er of Earthly Bliss

Steele/Naegel

“**W**hat? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10) These words of Job capture the overall sentiment of this month’s hymn, but the hymn goes a step farther, adding a petition to God for His help to remain cheerful and thankful during times of distress. Although every aspect of our lives is in some way negatively affected by the fall, this hymn specifically requests grace to deal with the absence of joys that are experienced by most people and are often taken for granted as part of our human existence. For some people this can be singleness (or even a troubled marriage), while others may experience handicaps or bad health. This hymn speaks from the poetess’ own experience and feelings of “missing out” on life, and demonstrates the peace and joy that Christians can have even in such situations.

Anne Steele lived in the same time period and in the same locale as the great hymn writer Isaac Watts. She was the daughter of a Baptist preacher, and spent a good part of her life assisting him in his ministry. Her “missing out” on the “good” things of life began with the death of her mother when she was three years old. When she was nineteen, she suffered a bad fall from a horse, which left her somewhat crippled for the rest of her life. Two years later, when she was twenty-one, she was engaged to be married, but her husband-to-be drowned the

very day before the wedding was to take place. Although it was not published until many years later, this hymn was presumably inspired by this large disappointment.¹

The three verses that make up this short hymn were taken from a longer poem entitled “Desiring Resignation and Thankfulness.” They were selected and edited into their present form by Augustus Toplady (author of “Rock of Ages”). To give some context to this hymn, here is the full poem in its original version.

Desiring Resignation and Thankfulness

When I survey life’s varied scene
Amid the darkest hours
Sweet rays of comfort shine between
And thorns are mixed with flowers.

Lord, teach me to adore Thy hand
From whence my comforts flow
And let me in this desert land
A glimpse of Canaan know.

Is health and ease my happy share?
O may I bless my God;
Thy kindness let my songs declare
And spread Thy praise abroad.

While such delightful gifts as these
Are kindly dealt to me
Be all my hours of health and ease
Devoted Lord to Thee.

In griefs and pains Thy sacred Word
(Dear solace of my soul!)

PAGE 26

SWORD AND TRUMPET

Father, Whate'er of Earthly Bliss

"No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" – PSALM 84:11

ANNE STEELE, 1760

NAOMI C.M.

JOHANN G. NAEGEL

ARR. BY LOWELL MASON, 1836

1. Fa - ther, what-e'er of earth-ly bliss Thy sov-'reign will de - nies,
 2. Give me a calm, a thank-ful heart, From ev - 'ry mur-mur free;
 3. Let the sweet hope that Thou art mine My life and death at - tend;

Ac - cept - ed at Thy throne of grace, Let this pe - ti - tion rise:
 The bless-ings of Thy grace im - part, And make me live to Thee.
 Thy pres-ence thro' my jour - ney shine, And crown my jour-ney's end.

Celestial comforts can afford
 And all their power control.

When present sufferings pain my heart
 Or future terrors rise
 And light and hope almost depart
 From these dejected eyes

Thy powerful Work supports my hope
 Sweet cordial of the mind
 And bears my fainting spirit up
 And bids me wait resigned.

And, oh, whate'er of earthly bliss
 Thy sovereign hand denies
 Accepted at Thy throne of grace
 Let this petition rise,

"Give me a calm, a thankful heart
 From every murmur free;
 The blessings of Thy grace impart,
 And let me live to Thee.

Let the sweet hope that Thou art mine
 My path of life attend—
 Thy presence through my journey shine
 And bless its happy end."

1. igracemusic.com

CAN MAN CREATE LIFE? . . . cont'd.

to advancements in areas such as medicine or bio-fuels. Advancements such as that represent the work of real or true science by definition, but when work such as this is used to conjecture about the past it is mere speculation. ■

1. Bland, Eric, *It's alive! Artificial DNA controls life*, Discovery News, May 20, 2010. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/37256799/ns/technology_and_science-science/.
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4. <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/HEALTH/05/21/venter.ga/index.html>. "We created a new cell. It's alive. But we didn't create life from scratch. We created, as all life on this planet is, out of a living cell." This quote was taken from a CNN interview with Venter.
5. Answers in Genesis, *News to Note*, May 22, 2010. <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/05/22/news-to-note-05222010>.
6. Ibid.
7. <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/HEALTH/05/21/venter.ga/index.html>. "It's a big deal for us. We've been working on it for 15 years." This quote was taken from a CNN interview with Venter.

"Scripture makes abundantly clear that we are to be members of a local church." – Kenneth Kantzer

Why Join a Church?

by Donald S. Whitney

"WHY SHOULD I JOIN THE CHURCH?"

Despite my seminary training and pastoral experience, I was unprepared for this new Christian's question. He agreed from our study of the Scripture that he needed to identify himself as a disciple of Christ through baptism, but then he asked, "Can you show me from the New Testament that I'm supposed to *officially* join anything?"

Now he really had me.

"If I come and worship as often as the members," he continued, "if I fellowship with these believers as much as anyone else, if I profit from the teaching and other ministries of the church, and if I actively demonstrate love for my brothers and sisters in Christ here, why should I formally join the church?"

His question struck me with an uncomfortable logic.

I began to realize that many of my conclusions about church membership were actually nothing more than previously unchallenged assumptions. These assumptions were now melting into questions of my own. Can I give reasons from Scripture why anyone should join a church? Did the Christians in New Testament times formally join churches or did they have more of an informal relationship? Did the churches in the days of the Apostle Paul have a membership list? How do I respond to the rising tide of opinion that says church membership is merely an unchallenged, but unbiblical tradition and an unnecessary formality?

Here's what I found.

BIBLICAL INDICATIONS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

To start with, we encounter the word *church* throughout the New Testament. In

the great majority of instances the term refers to a specific local church like that in Rome or Corinth. Sometimes when we read of the church the reference is to what's often called the church universal, that is, all Christians everywhere. But when you read "church" in the Bible, it almost always means "local church."

At the very least, the local church was the fellowship of the followers of Jesus Christ in a particular area. We know that they met together, worshiped together, prayed together, etc., as the born-again family of God. But did people actually join this fellowship in some official way, or was it a mutually-assumed and less formal association?

The New Testament church practice of keeping a list of widows makes sense in the context of membership.

We know that churches in the days of the Apostle Paul made and maintained at least one type of list. "No widow may be put on the list of widows," Paul instructs Timothy, "unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband," etc. (1 Timothy 5:9, NIV). As easily as the churches had lists of widows, they could have had lists of members. There would be no difference except for length for a church to keep a widows' list and a membership list.

The instructions for church discipline makes sense only in the context of membership.

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gave us instructions on how the church should respond when someone within the church persists in living like an unbeliever. We read of a specific case of this in 1 Corinthians 5 and how the Apostle Paul, writing under

the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, instructed the Christians in the church at Corinth to handle it. In verses 11-13 Paul says, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

There was a sexually immoral man in this church. Was Paul simply telling them not to let this man come to church with them because he was acting like an unbeliever instead of a Christian? No, he couldn't have meant that, for we know from other places in this letter (cf. 14:24, 25) that unbelievers were welcome to attend church meetings. Even when they obeyed Paul's instructions to "put away from among yourselves that wicked person" and considered the man an unbeliever, they would have allowed (even welcomed) him to come and sit under the preaching of God's Word like any other person in town. So in what sense would they have "put away" ("remove" – NASB, "expel" – NIV) this man?

The best way of explaining how they would have "put away" this man is to understand that they removed him from the membership of the church and generally stopped associating with him outside the church meetings.

Notice that Paul refers to those who are "within" and to those who are "without." Without what? As we've noted, anyone could attend their meetings. This kind of language can only refer to a definite church membership of converted people. For what authority does a group have to remove someone who is already "without" and not a member of the group? You can't fire someone who doesn't work for you. You can't vote in your country to remove a government official elected by another country. You can't appeal to a court to discipline someone who isn't within its jurisdiction. In

the same way, you can't formally discipline someone who is in an informal relationship with you; you have no authority to do so. These people in Corinth had voluntarily committed themselves to a formal relationship and they knew who were official members of the church and who were "without."

Church discipline must be done by the "church" (Matthew 18:17) and occur "when ye are gathered together" (1 Cor. 5:4). Who is to gather together? How do you know who the "church" is? How do you determine who does and does not have the right to speak and vote on such matters? Does the person subject to discipline have the liberty to bring in his extended family or coworkers who have never been to the church, or even people off the street, and expect them to be given an equal say with those who have been faithful to the church for years? No? Why not? Do you exclude them from involvement because they've never been part of the church? Then what about the person who attended once five years ago? Or those who came at Easter and Christmas last year? Or those who regularly watch the church services on television or listen to them on the radio, and perhaps even send money, but never enter the building? Or those from distant cities who visit several times each year because of family members in the church? Obviously, Biblical church discipline must be limited to a specific group and that must mean the church *members*.

The meaning of the word join in Acts 5:13 makes sense only in the context of membership.

In Acts 5:13 we read of the reaction of the non-Christians in Jerusalem after a couple within the church, Ananias and Sapphira, had died on the spot when it was revealed that they had lied to the church. It says, "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them." The unbelievers had great respect for the Christians, but after this incident none of them who claimed to be converted but were outward-only believers wanted to join the church.

In the Greek language in which Paul wrote this letter, the word he used that's translated here as "join" literally means "to glue or cement together, to unite, to join firmly." It doesn't refer to an informal, merely assumed sort of relationship, but one where you choose to "glue" or "join" yourself firmly to the others. Again, that kind of language only makes sense in the context of membership.

That same "glue word" is used in the New Testament to describe being joined together in a sexual relationship (1 Cor. 6:16) and being joined to the Lord in one spirit in salvation (1 Cor. 6:17). And it's the very same word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 5:11 when he says "not to keep company with" any so-called brother who continues in immorality, but rather to "put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Clearly this kind of language doesn't refer to a casual, superficial, or informal relationship.

So when it says in Acts 5:13 that no insincere believer "durst join them," the "glue word" used there speaks of such a cohesive, bonding relationship that it must be referring to a recognized church membership.

The meaning of "the whole church" in 1 Corinthians 14:23 makes sense only in the context of membership.

The earthly founder of the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul, wrote to this new body of Christians about their many difficulties, including how to bring order to their public worship. He began 1 Corinthians 14:23 with, "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, . . ." Who did he have in mind when he referred to "the whole church"? The only realistic answer is "the church members." That's why one commentator, working with the original language of this text, translates it "If then the whole church assembles together and all *its members*" [emphasis mine] and notes "(the last two words are not in the Greek but are naturally to be understood)."¹ Imagine the leaders of the Corinthian Christians walking into the gathering of the church for worship one Sunday. Would they have known by looking,

or would they have had some way of deciding, whether "the whole church" was there? Surely they would have known who was supposed to be present in a churchwide meeting and who was missing. But how else could they have known when "the whole church" was "together in one place" without knowing who was a member and who wasn't? This implies a verifiable membership.

The instructions for pastoral oversight and spiritual leadership make sense only in the context of membership.

"This is a true saying," said Paul to Timothy, "if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Timothy 3:1). In other places the New Testament also refers to a bishop, or "overseer" as the NIV and NASB render it, as a pastor or elder (Acts 20:17, 28; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5-7). But what or whom does he oversee? How can he provide spiritual oversight if he doesn't know exactly those for whom he is responsible? A distinguishable, mutually-understood membership is required for him to fulfill his charge.

Down in verse 5 it says of an overseer, "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" The local church is compared to a family. Is anyone a casual member of a family? No, membership in a family is a very definite thing.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves," Paul instructed the elders of the church of Ephesus, "and to all the flock" (Acts 20:28). How could they fulfill their responsibility as undershepherds to "all" the flock unless they knew who was part of "the flock" and who was not? These leaders of a growing church in a large city needed some means of identification of those for whom they were to "take heed." A simple membership list is the logical solution.

In Hebrews 13:17 is a word addressed to those under such overseers: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may

do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” For whom will the leaders of a church give an account—everyone who comes in and out of their church services? No, it has to be a limited group of people—the members of the church—for whom they will be answerable. Otherwise, how can church leaders be responsible for someone until they know he or she is committed to their care? The Bible’s instructions for pastoral oversight and spiritual leadership can best be obeyed when there is a well-defined church membership.

The metaphors used to describe local churches (flock, temple, body, household) make sense only in the context of membership.

The New Testament uses several metaphors to describe churches. Some of these metaphors describe the church of Christ collectively throughout the world. While all of them could potentially apply to the local church also, at least four of these metaphors—flock, temple, body, and household—are definitely used to refer to individual churches (in Acts 20:28; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Corinthians 12:27; and 1 Timothy 3:15). And each metaphor is best understood in a setting of specific church membership.

A *flock* of sheep isn’t a random collection of ewes, rams, and lambs. Shepherds know their flocks. They know which sheep are theirs to care for and which are not. Sheep belong to specific flocks. This is also the way it should be for God’s spiritual sheep. A *temple* building, just like a church building, shouldn’t have any loose bricks or blocks. If it does, something’s wrong. Each one of them has a definite place. “There is no place,” said an English preacher long ago, “for any loose stone in God’s edifice.”² The same analogy is true for a human *body*. Your body isn’t a casual collection of loosely related parts. You don’t keep your fingers in your pocket until you need them. They are joined. They are members of the body. The local body of Christ should be like this

also—those joined to Christ, who are members of His body—should express that relationship through a visible membership. And in a *household*, a family, you’re either a member or you’re not. So if you are part of the family of God, show it by joining a local expression of God’s family.

British pastor Eric Lane sees additional significance in this quartet of metaphors:

God has given us four pictures of the church, not one. This is not just to emphasize and prove the point by repetition, but also to say four different things about what it means to be a member of a church. To be a stone in his temple means to belong to a worshiping community. To be part of a body means to belong to a living, functioning, serving, witnessing community. To be a sheep in the flock means belonging to a community dependent on him for food, protection, and direction. To be a member of a family is to belong to a community bound by a common fatherhood. Put together you have the main functions of an individual Christian. Evidently we are meant to fulfill these not on our own but together in the church. Now can you see the answer to the question why you should join a church?³

We’ve just seen five Biblical indications that New Testament churches had membership lists of some sort. They knew who was a member and who was not. When people became followers of Jesus, or when followers of Jesus moved to another town, they formally identified themselves with a local church—they *joined* it. “In the New Testament there is no such person as a Christian who is not a church member,” writes Douglas G. Millar. Conversion was described as ‘the Lord added to the church’ (Acts 2:47). There was no spiritual drifting.”⁴

Perhaps you are persuaded that the churches in the days of the New Testament had membership lists and that people joined the churches instead of “drifting.” Are there other Biblical reasons why Christians should be members of a church today? Here are some . . .

BIBLICAL REASONS FOR JOINING A CHURCH

You prove that you're not ashamed to identify with Christ or His people.

Jesus said (in Mark 8:38) that if anyone is ashamed to identify himself with Him on earth then He will not identify Himself with that person when he or she stands before God in the judgment.

Joining a church is one of the plainest ways of saying you're not ashamed to identify yourself with Jesus and with His people. Jesus certainly made a formal commitment to identify Himself with His people when He left Heaven to come to earth and die as a man. Can, then, one for whom Christ died be reluctant to identify himself formally with the others for whom Christ died? California pastor John MacArthur explains and asks further, "You have been joined together with Christ. . . . You bear His name. Are you ashamed to belong? Are you ashamed to bear that identification with other believers of like precious faith? . . . Shouldn't you be willing outwardly to identify with the visible, gathered members of that group to which you eternally belong?"⁵

When you join a church you make it clear whose side you're on. You're telling the family of God that you're part of the family too, and that you don't want to be considered "without" (1 Cor. 5:12, 13) any longer.

You stop being an independent Christian and place yourself under the discipline and protection of other Christians.

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus set up an accountability system. When a professing believer starts living like an unbeliever, those in the church who know about it are to confront him about his sin. First, one is to go to this person, and then, if he will not listen, the one is to bring one or two others along for a second conversation. The goal is to restore him back to full fellowship with the Lord and his fellow believers. If he persistently and unrepentantly refuses to return to the Lord, the final step is to report the matter to the church. Then everyone in

the church has the chance to win the person back. And if he continues in his sin, the church is to withdraw fellowship from him as the final means of showing him his need to repent.

If you aren't part of the church, they have no authority over you and cannot do what Jesus said to do. Unless you join the church, your independence places you outside the way Jesus wants things to happen. Incidentally, when Jesus says in verse 17 to bring this matter "unto the church," how do you know who should be notified (and who should not be) unless there is a formally recognized membership?

Related to this idea of spiritual authority, recall Hebrews 13:17, the passage we examined which tells us to obey the leaders of the church and submit to them because they keep watch over our souls. The leaders of the church are to "watch over" you by providing spiritual protection for you and caring about your growth in Christ. You place yourself outside that spiritual watchcare unless you join a local church.

You participate in a stronger, more unified effort of God's people to obey Christ's command to reach others.

The last thing Jesus said before returning to Heaven is known to Christians today as the Great Commission. It's found in Matthew 28:19, 20 where Jesus told His disciples (and us), "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

I've met a few people who weren't interested in church membership but who were zealously witnessing to others about Christ and trying to make disciples for Him. Since they do so well what relatively few Christians do at all (i.e., share their faith), why emphasize church membership to them? They need to see that joining a church is like putting one candle with many others. They will give off more light collectively

than the one lone candle ever could, and together they will have a greater penetration into the world's darkness.

And as your local church reaches across the country and around the world in direct and indirect support of missionary work, you can participate in ways of reaching the world for Christ that you could have never dreamed otherwise.

In contrast, consider the potential negative impact on your efforts to talk about Jesus if you don't join His earthly body. John MacArthur says we should ask ourselves, "How wonderful can Christ be if we're not even committed to being associated with His church?"⁶ How believable is our testimony of the goodness and greatness of Christ if we don't want to identify openly with Christ's family?

You have a greater opportunity to use your spiritual gift "for the profit of all."

At the moment of salvation when the Holy Spirit comes to live within a believer in Christ, He brings a gift with Him. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit," Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:4. He continues in verse 11, "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." For what purpose does God gift each Christian? The answer is in verse 7: "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." God gifts you individually so that you will use your gift "for the profit" of others. You have a greater opportunity to do that when you use your gift in and through local church membership. Yes, you can use your spiritual gift for the good of God's people without joining a church. But in a lot of churches, many of the ministry opportunities are available for church members only. That's because the church wants to know that you stand with her doctrinally and support her ministry goals before you're asked to minister in certain positions. Besides, remaining outside the membership of the church may say more about your desire to serve than you intend. "Not joining the

church," according to MacArthur, "is saying, 'I don't want to serve the only institution Christ ever built.'"⁷ So the best way to maximize the effectiveness of your spiritual gift is to use it "for the profit of all" in a local church as a member.

You openly demonstrate the reality of the body of Christ.

"Now you are the body of Christ," Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, "and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27, NIV). But how can we see the body of Christ? When you join a church, you make it visible. You give a living demonstration of the spiritual reality of the body of Christ. You show that even though you are an individual, you are a part of the body, you are joined together with others. You take the body of Christ out of the realm of the theoretical and give it a meaning that people can see.

As pastor and author Ben Patterson puts it, "To join a particular part of the body of Christ is not to bring something into existence that was not there before. It is simply to make actual what is spiritual, to prove that the spiritual is real."⁸

You participate in a more balanced ministry than you can otherwise experience.

In Ephesians 4:11-16 we read of the Lord giving gifted men such as evangelists and pastor-teachers to the church. We're taught that each part—every member—of the church body has a job to do for the body to function properly and grow. It's a picture of wholeness and balance. We need this God-ordained mutual ministry to be what God intends.

Further, God has designed us so that we can't get this well-rounded ministry on our own. No one develops the proper spiritual symmetry just by listening to Christian radio, watching Christian television, or reading Christian books. You can't get this kind of maturity merely by participating in a group Bible study. Unless you're an active part of a local church, your Christian life and ministry will be imbalanced.

You demonstrate your commitment, not to “spiritual hitchhiking,” but to “the proper working of each individual part” in the visible body of Christ.

Some time ago in the magazine of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, a writer made an interesting observation about the hitchhiker. He wants a free ride. He assumes no responsibility for the money needed to buy the car, the gas to run it, or the cost of maintenance. He expects a comfortable ride and adequate safety. He assumes the driver has insurance covering him in case of an accident. He thinks little of asking the driver to take him to a certain place even though it may involve extra miles or inconvenience.

Think about the “spiritual hitchhiker” who has settled all his major questions about the matters and has definitely decided where he wants to attend church, but now wants all the benefits and privileges of that church’s ministry without taking any responsibility for it. His attitude is all take and no give. He wants no accountability, just a free ride.

This is not meant to discourage those who are attending a church to find answers about Jesus Christ and are still uncertain about their eternal destiny. If that describes you, your first priority is to come to Christ rather than to come for church membership.

Neither is this intended to deter those who are sincerely and actively seeking God’s will in a decision about a church home. Sometimes that decision cannot be made quickly. A wise person evaluates a church carefully before joining its membership.

A “spiritual hitchhiker,” however, has no real intention of joining the church, at least not soon. He only wants to enjoy its advantages without any obligation on his part. He wants convenience without commitment, to be served rather than to serve. But every true Christian is to be committed to “the proper working of each individual part” (Ephesians 4:16, NASB) in a local church. When you join a church, you’re saying you believe in taking your “individual part” and that you don’t want to be a “spiritual hitchhiker.”

PAGE 34

You “exhort” new believers to the same “good works” of commitment to the local body of Christ.

In the familiar passage on church commitment, Hebrews 10:24, 25 says, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Notice the command to “consider one another” that is associated here with church involvement. Bear in mind the message you give to other believers, especially new believers, if you do not join a church. What are you modeling to new believers when you remain uncommitted to the local church? Do they see your example and learn that the church isn’t important enough to join? Do they get the message that the Kingdom of God is not worth such an investment of yourself? Do they interpret your actions as saying that the work of God does not deserve a full commitment?

On the other hand, joining a church is one way of “exhorting one another” as this passage puts it, “to love and good works.” When you do join the local church you provide a positive example that says, “This is worth being a part of and I recommend it to you.”

You encourage a ministry when you consider it faithful and join it.

Suppose John loves Mary and sees no one else but her for ten years. Every time they are together he tells her that he loves her, but never proposes to her. Finally, after a decade she has enough nerve to ask him, “John, why haven’t you wanted to marry me?”

If he says, “I’m just trying to make sure,” how do you think she would feel? Of course, she’s glad he says he loves her, and she’s thankful for all he does for her, and she’s pleased that he doesn’t see anyone else, but in spite of all that, she’s going to be somewhat discouraged because he doesn’t love her enough to decisively commit himself to her.

SWORD AND TRUMPET

The people and pastor of a church are glad whenever you attend. But if you keep coming and never join, they may begin to wonder what Mary wondered about John, despite how happy you seem to be with the church and how many wonderful things you say about it. So there is a sense in which your attendance and involvement can actually discourage the church and its leaders if, after a reasonable time, you do not join it.

Conversely, the church is encouraged (the NASB and NIV render “exhort” in Hebrews 10:25 as “encourage”), and its leadership is encouraged, when you indicate by joining the church that you love it and think it is a biblically faithful ministry worthy of your commitment.

BIBLICAL RESPONSES TO THIS MESSAGE

Now that you’ve read these things about church membership, what should you do?

Turn from living for yourself and follow Christ, the Head of the church.

Membership in a local church does not mean that you are part of the body of Christ. Without Christ, church membership means nothing. Hell is filled with people who were church members. Before you respond to the challenge of church membership, you must make sure you know Jesus Christ, who is “head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1:22). Your greatest need in life is not to be on the membership roll of a church; it is to be made right with God by the One who died for the church, who created the church, who loves the church, and who is returning someday for His true church.

What should you do? The Bible says you should repent and believe in the Gospel (Mark 1:15), i.e., the message about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To repent and believe in this way involves turning from living for yourself and turning in faith to Jesus Christ. Recognize that your sin has separated you from God (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:23). You’ve repeatedly broken God’s laws and this excludes you from His family and from eternity with Him.

Come to Christ, however, and He can make you right with God. Believe that His death can cleanse you from all guilt before God and provide you with all the righteousness God requires. This is infinitely more important than church membership.

Present yourself to the church for baptism as a symbol of identification with Christ and His church.

Ten days after Jesus had ascended back to Heaven, the Holy Spirit of God descended upon the believers who were gathered in Jerusalem. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter preached that morning to the crowd that had gathered because of the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. About three thousand people turned from their sin and believed that the crucified and risen Jesus was their Messiah and God. Then, according to Acts 2:41, “they that gladly received his word were baptized.” If you have received (i.e., believed) the word about Jesus Christ, you should be baptized.

Baptism is a church ordinance commanded by Christ (Matt. 28:19). If you have trusted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, you should present yourself to a local church as a candidate for baptism. By this means you will openly identify yourself as a follower of Christ and a member of His body.

Present yourself for membership in a local, New Testament church if you’ve been Scripturally baptized and your membership is elsewhere.

Have you come to Christ and been baptized? Then you should formally identify yourself with the people of Christ where you live. If you have moved, or for some other reason have membership in a church you no longer attend, you should unite with the believers of a biblically-based, Christ-centered church where you can participate faithfully. (See Acts 18:27 and Romans 16:1, 2 for a New Testament example of Christians who identified with and served with a local congregation even when they were in a place which might not have been their

permanent residence.)

When I was in college I faithfully attended a local church. After about a year I realized that my membership needed to be in that church, not the one back home that I grew up in but now rarely visited. So I presented myself for membership in the church where I was worshiping regularly. Today I encourage students to become members of a church in their college town, because that's where they are most of the time. If they are home for the summer, I suggest that, if practical, they move their membership back to their hometown church for those three months. There are two good reasons for doing this. One, there's no guarantee that their plans won't change. Two, this develops a healthy pattern of thinking "Join a church here" whenever they relocate. This habit will serve them well when they graduate and move away from college to who-knows-where, not to mention each of the several times they are likely to move in the coming decades.

Reaffirm the commitment implied in your present church membership.

If you are presently a member of the local church you attend, you should exercise your spiritual gifts in and through that church (see Romans 12:5, 6a). Membership implies commitment and activity. All the living parts of the body of Christ should be working and fulfilling their God-intended function.

Think about this: a member of a human body, such as a heart or kidney, cannot exist apart from the body, except by some temporary and artificial sustenance. But this isn't what it's designed for. In this sheer existence the organ doesn't fulfill its function in the body. It isn't nourished in the way God intended through the body, but subsists only through some synthetic way that provides mere maintenance but doesn't stimulate growth or development.

In the same way, a true member of Christ's body is *not designed* to operate independently or outside the body. An authentic part of Christ's spiritual body

cannot be content while separated from the rest of His earthly body. That's because he or she is made for interdependence, not independence.

As wonderful and sophisticated as the heart is, it was never made to be just a heart, but a *part of a body*. It has no value to the body outside the body. And the heart itself can't thrive outside the body. As incredible and wonderful as you are, Christian, you were never made just to be an individual Christian, but a *part of body*. As every organ and every cell is God-created to be an active member of the human body, so every true Christian is God-created to be an active member of a local body of Christ.

Are you a true Christian? Are you an actively and biblically involved member of a local body of Christ? "Belonging to the church," says John MacArthur, "is at the very heart of Christianity."⁹ Church membership involves many responsibilities, but we must never lose sight of the great privilege that it really is. "We must grasp once again," said Martyn Lloyd-Jones of London in the mid-twentieth century, "the idea of church membership as being the membership of the body of Christ and as the biggest honour which can come a man's way in this world."¹⁰ ■

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